

THE NEW JULFA STYLE OF ARMENIAN MANUSCRIPT BINDINGS¹

Dickran Kouymjian

Among the several crafts Armenians engaged in at New Julfa, the Armenian suburb of Isfahan established after the forced deportation ordered by Shah Abbas in 1604-1605, bookbinding remains virtually unstudied. The research described below intends to correct the situation by presenting the design features of leather manuscript bindings executed in New Julfa from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century.

The study of Armenian binding craftsmanship is in its infancy. Thanks to a recent doctoral dissertation by Sylvie Merian we now have a sense of the technical procedures used in their making.² Though a number of articles have been written about the general appearance of Armenian bookbindings,³ no one has yet undertaken a serious study of their artistic decoration. No regional style has been described, no workshop identified.

The central problem inherent in classifying bindings is dating them properly. Most Armenian manuscripts are precisely dated thanks to the common use of memorials by scribes.⁴ Binders' colophons are rarer and

¹ The present article was originally presented as a paper at the joint Iranian Studies Association and the Society for Armenian Studies panel entitled "Shiraz, Isfahan, Tehran—Persian or Armenian Art," part of the 29th Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association held in Washington, D.C., in December 1995. I would like to thank the Bertha and John Garabedian Charitable Foundation of Fresno for providing a grant to complete some of this research.

² Sylvie L. Merian, *The Structure of Armenian Bookbinding and Its Relation to Near Eastern Bookmaking Traditions* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1993); see also S. Merian, "From Venice to Isfahan and Back: The Making of an Armenian Manuscript in Early 18th Century Persia," in *The Compleat Binder: Studies in Book Making and Conservation in Honour of Roger Powell*, ed. John Shapre III, in press.

³ Garegin Hovsep'ean, *Mi ej hay aruesti ew mshakoyt'i patmut'iwnits'* (A Page from the History of Armenian Art and Culture) (Aleppo: Arax Printing House, B. T'op'alian, 1930), 56 pages with 21 illustrations, at the time Hovsep'ean was archbishop and prelate of New Julfa; Babgen Arak'elyan, "Kazmeri zardarman arveste mijnadaryan Hayastanum" (The Art of Bookbinding Decoration in Medieval Armenia), *Banber Matenadarani* 4 (1958), pp. 183-203, with 15 illustrations.

⁴ 60% of Armenian manuscripts are precisely dated; D. Kouymjian, "Dated Armenian Manuscripts as a Statistical Tool for Armenian History," in *Medieval Armenian Culture*, ed. Thomas J. Samuelian and Michael E. Stone, University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies 6 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 425-439.

not as consistent in providing date and place of execution. Furthermore, a manuscript is written just once, but is often bound and rebound several times. In the absence of binders' colophons, only a close examination of the structure and sewing of a binding can determine whether it is original or a rebinding.

Armenian bindings are decorated with blind tooling: designs are stamped on the leather without gold leaf for highlighting, a fashion much favored in Renaissance-era European and Islamic countries. The leather was decorated after the manuscript had been bound. A variety of tools, sometimes called irons, with floral and geometric motifs, were used to achieve the designs. In earlier centuries these designs were often composed of braided elements.

While studying the large collection of Armenian manuscripts at the Mekhitarist monastery in Venice,⁵ I was intrigued by seven bindings which had incorporated into their decoration dated inscriptions. It seemed at the time, 1978, that I had stumbled on to a decisive element for the accurate dating of Armenian bindings and a point of departure for their rational organization.

I reported on this dated series at the Fifth International Symposium on Armenian Art held in Venice in 1988.⁶ Since no other binding traditions in the Near East or the West had employed such elaborate inscriptions, they were sure to be of general interest to the history of bookbinding. The Venice group ranged in date from 1663 to 1787. Convinced others from earlier centuries existed, I began scouring manuscript catalogs while reviewing examples already published. In 1990 I reported on four more, three from the Bibliothèque nationale de France and one from the Matenadaran.⁷

The methodology to be followed was clear: publish the inscription with the binding's date; provide general information on the manuscript: date, place, text, scribe, patron, size, etc.; reproduce and describe the designs of the upper and lower covers as well as the textile pieces used

⁵ With Guy Petherbridge, 1978-1979, a broad survey was prepared but never published.

⁶ Dickran Kouymjian, "Inscribed Armenian Manuscript Bindings in the Collection of the Mekhitarist Brotherhood of Venice," in *Atti del Quinto Simposio Internazionale di Arte Armena, Venezia/Milano/Bologna/Firenze, 1988, 28 maggio-5 giugno*, ed. Boghos Levon Zekian (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1991), pp. 403-412.

⁷ Frédéric Macler, "Note sur quelques manuscrits arméniens avec reliure à inscription," *Banasér* (January, 1905), pp. 14-20; Arak'elyan, "Kazmeri zardarman"; D. Kouymjian, "Les reliures des manuscrits arméniens à inscriptions," in *Actes, Table ronde de codicologie comparée, Ecole normale supérieure, Paris, December 1990*, ed. Ph. Hoffmann, in press.

to line the insides of the boards of traditional Armenian bindings; and, finally, prepare a catalog of stamping tools used in the decoration. Armed with these precisely dated examples, one could examine *undated* leather bindings for designs and tooling similar to those on the dated covers. The pool of dated samples could be further enlarged by including manuscripts with binders' colophons unmistakably associated with surviving bindings. By identifying inscribed and dated bindings prior to the seventeenth century in other and larger collections, the horizons of the model group would be greatly extended and a detailed profile of Armenian binding patterns established.

Very quickly some 115 inscribed and dated bindings were identified, ranging in date from 1585 to 1926, from four major collections: the Matenadaran in Erevan, the All Savior Monastery in New Julfa, the Mekhitarist Library in Venice, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris.⁸ Unfortunately, it proved impossible to push the early limits of dated bindings any further back than the second half of the sixteenth century. Furthermore, late eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century items were mostly rebindings, for though manuscript copying came to a halt in the eighteenth century, restoration or replacement of damaged covers continued and continues. On the other hand, while publishing the small corpus of inscribed bindings from Venice, I observed that the first six, dated from 1663 to 1710, were all associated in some way with New Julfa.⁹ The seventh binding, of 1787, was in a totally different and very primitive style and was in no way connected to the others.¹⁰

Personal examination of inscribed bindings in the Erevan, Venice, and Paris collections and the study of the New Julfa collection through photographs and manuscript catalogs¹¹ made it clear that inscribed bindings were a New Julfa phenomenon, one which lasted less than a hundred years. Of the list of 115 manuscripts, the eleven earliest bindings, dating from 1585 to 1619, are crafted in various localities. Those

⁸ The list has never been published.

⁹ Kouymjian, "Venice," and D. Kouymjian, "Inscribed Armenian Manuscript Bindings: A Preliminary General Survey," in *Armenian Texts, Tasks and Tools*, ed. Henning Lehmann and J.J.S. Weitenberg (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1993), pp. 101-109 plus five plates.

¹⁰ Venice manuscript no. 1708; in fact there is no design, and stamping tools were not used, see Kouymjian, "Venice," p. 409, no. 7, figs. 6A-b; Kouymjian, "Inscribed Armenian Manuscript Bindings," p. 108, no. 5, figs. 5A-B.

¹¹ Prints and photos of inscribed bindings from the New Julfa collection were kindly supplied by Archbishop Goriun Babian with the assistance of Levon Minasian.

I have examined show usually very short, usually casual, inscriptions. The most recent bindings on the list, dating from 1758 to 1926, were done in a variety of different styles from Greater Armenia, the Crimea, Poland, Russia, and Karabakh. All of the remaining ninety or so inscribed bindings are from New Julfa, all display a distinctive look, and most are of high artistic quality.

The conclusion is clear: inscribed Armenian bindings represent a fashion localized at New Julfa from 1658 to about 1750. The initial hope that a general profile of the various schools of bookbinding in Armenia could be established through a study of these inscribed book covers gave way to a more concrete notion: the ability to reconstruct the ordered development of the most important center of Armenian binding skills in the final stages of Armenian manuscript production.

The largest collections of New Julfa bindings are preserved, as might be expected, in New Julfa itself and the Matenadaran in Erevan, which encompasses the older and famous collection of Holy Ejmiatsin. Under the reign of Shah Abbas and his immediate successors, there was a very close relationship between Ejmiatsin and New Julfa. The infamous project of transferring the Ejmiatsin cathedral stone by stone to New Julfa dates from the middle of the seventeenth century. This link is strengthened by seventeen colophons which report that manuscripts from Ejmiatsin needing repair were sent to New Julfa for rebinding, then returned.¹²

I have separated the decor of New Julfa bindings into a number of types (and subtypes), which follow one another chronologically.¹³ My concern so far has been exclusively with inscribed bindings; there are many more New Julfa manuscript covers without inscriptions which uti-

¹² Levon Minasean, *Grch'ut'ean arwestē Nor Jughayum* (The Art of Writing in New Julfa) (New Julfa: Armenian Prelacy, 1991), p. 12.

¹³ Nearly all the bindings discussed in this study have never before been published. References to earlier literature are given whenever manuscripts have been previously described. Most manuscripts cited have been published in the respective manuscript catalogs of each of the collections: For Venice, Mekhitarist Collection, 6 vols. 1914-1996; Erevan, Matenadaran, an abridged catalog (manuscripts 1-10560), O. Eganyan, A. Zeyt'unyan, and P'. Ant'abyan, *Ts'uts'ak dzeragrats' Mashtots'i anvan matenadarani* (Catalog of the Manuscripts in the Library Named after Mashtots'), 2 vols. (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1965-1970), and vol. 1 (manuscripts 1-300) of the detailed catalog, O. Eganyan, A. Zeut'unyan, and P'. Ant'abyan, *Mayr ts'uts'ak hayerēn dzeragrats'* (Detailed Catalog of Armenian Manuscripts) (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1984); Paris, Frédéric Macler, *Catalogue des manuscrits arméniens et géorgiens de la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1908); and for New Julfa, Smbat Tēr-Awetisian, *Ts'uts'ak hayerēn dzeragrats' Nor Jughayi Amenap'rkich' Vank'i* (Catalog of the Armenian Manuscripts in the Monastery of All Savior in New Julfa), 2 vols. (Vienna: Mekhitarist Press, 1970-1972).

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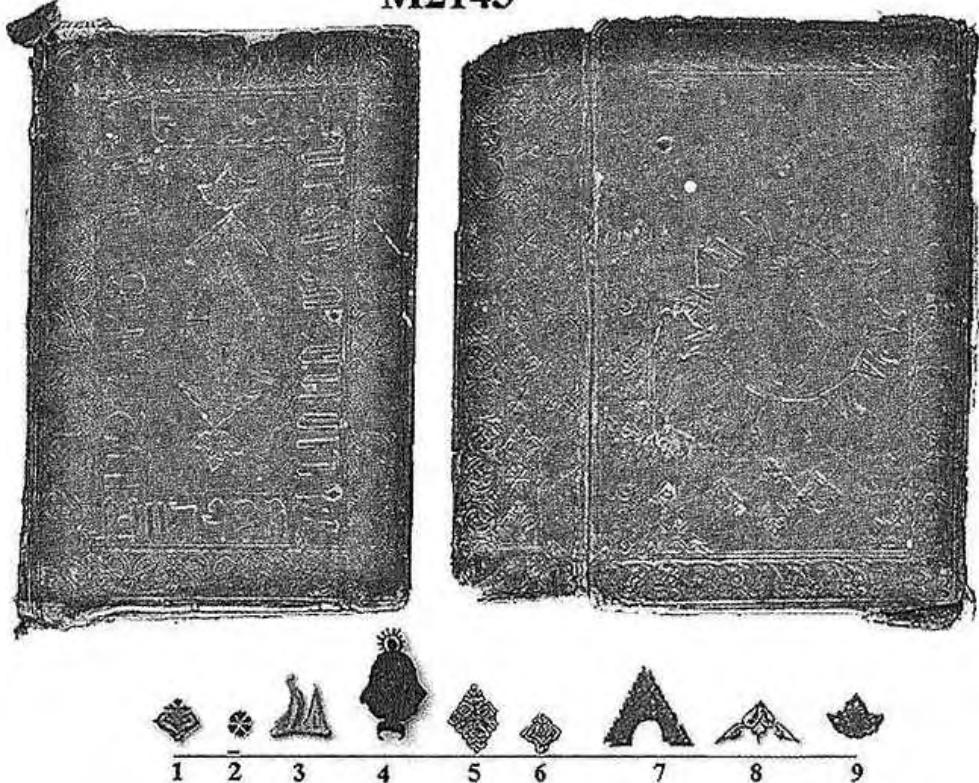


Figure 1: Venice manuscript no. 2143 of 1663: upper cover; flap and lower cover showing the Virgin within a starburst; and a catalog of stamps employed in the decoration.

lize the same fine decoration. When all are gathered together and studied our notion of the categories of decoration presented in this preliminary overview may have to be modified. In the descriptions of manuscripts discussed in this article, my concern is exclusively with the ornamental designs of inscribed and dated bindings from New Julfa. I have not supplied the transcription or translation of the inscriptions, just their dates, nor any data on the manuscripts themselves, nor anything about the binders or scribes responsible for these manuscripts, nor on the cloth doublures that line the upper and lower covers. These data, especially those of Venice and Paris manuscripts, have been in part furnished in earlier articles cited in the footnotes. Future studies will provide full information on each binding, including the individual stamping tools used.

Initially, New Julfa bindings employed a rectangular running inscription in *erkat 'agir* (large majuscules) around the outer edge of the cover (Venice manuscript no. 2143 of 1663,¹⁴ fig. 1); in the central field is a

¹⁴ Kouymjian, "Venice," p. 407, no. 1, fig. 1, upper cover; Kouymjian, "Inscribed Armenian Manuscript Bindings," p. 107, no. 2, fig. 1, upper cover; Kouymjian, "Les reliures des manuscrits arméniens," no. 2.



Figure 2: New Julfa manuscript no. 452 of 1725, upper cover, diminishing rectangles.

circle enclosing either a crucifix or a standing Virgin. A later, though overlapping, type (Venice manuscript no. 1485 of 1698),¹⁵ has in the central rectangle an all-over design made of geometric and floral stamps. At the end of the tradition in the 1720s the decor turns into a series of enclosed frames diminishing in size to form a small rectangle in the cen-

¹⁵ Kouymjian, "Venice," pp. 407-408, no. 3, fig. 3, upper cover; Kouymjian, "Inscribed Armenian Manuscript Bindings," p. 107, no. 3, fig. 3, upper cover; Kouymjian, "Les reliures des manuscrits arméniens," no. 5.

ter of which is a figural stamp (New Julfa manuscript no. 452 of 1725, fig. 2).¹⁶

All of these designs were formed by metal tools¹⁷ with engraved relief or intaglio motifs, which were stamped onto the leather. Some of them were fashioned in New Julfa; others were clearly imported from the West. This study will focus on the oldest and perhaps the most productive type from among several broad designs. I have called it the sunburst-starburst type after the central motif, either a circle formed of flames or sunrays (Matenadaran manuscript no. 3032 of 1662, upper cover, fig. 3) or a circle formed by stars (Matenadaran manuscript no. 3032 of 1662, lower cover, fig. 4). Sometimes the circle is reinforced or replaced by circularly arranged punch dots (Matenadaran manuscript no. 2266 of 1693), and even reduced to a simple line circle.

Thus far, twenty-three inscribed bindings have been inventoried which belong to the sunburst-starburst group, twenty-two ranging in date from 1658 to 1699, with an additional weak representative from 1710.¹⁸ The earliest example is Matenadaran manuscript no. 200 of 1658, which shows on its lower cover (fig. 5) the Virgin standing on a crescent inside a circle formed of starbursts.¹⁹ The inscription accompanying the western-styled Virgin stamp in the central field reads MAR[I]AM instead of the more traditional Astuatsatsin (Theotokos), suggesting a European import. I have no reproduction of the upper cover, but it must be similar to those of 1662 (Matenadaran manuscript no. 3032, fig. 3) and of 1664 (Matenadaran manuscript no. 3829) both with a stamp of the crucifixion flanked by the abbreviations H[ISU]S K'[RISTO]S in Armenian within a sunburst and on the lower cover the Virgin again in the starburst. Another example of 1663 from the New Julfa collection confirms the upper cover design and on the lower cover (New Julfa manuscript no. 484 of 1663, fig. 6) portrays the Virgin in a double circle reinforced by a simple ring of punches within a second rectangular frame with MARIAM once again inscribed around the stamp.

¹⁶ A similar binding is preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Armenian manuscript no. 25, dated 1730, see Kouymjian, "Les reliures des manuscrits arméniens," no. 10.

¹⁷ The tools were probably made of iron, though François Richard, Curator of Oriental manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, has suggested that some of the stamps might have been made of wood, as in other traditions.

¹⁸ Venice manuscript no. 897 of 1710, see Kouymjian, "Venice," p. 408, no. 5, fig. 4.

¹⁹ Arak'elyan, "Kazmeri zardarman," fig. 14; Eganyan, Zeyt'unyan, and Ant'abyan, *Mayr ts'uts'ak*, vol. I, cols. 863-870; V. Hakobyan, *Hayeren dzagreri XVII dari hishatakaranner* (Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts of the XVIIth Century), vol. III (1641-1660) (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1984), p. 809, no. 1237/7; Kouymjian, "Les reliures des manuscrits arméniens," no. 1, illus.



Figure 3: Matenadaran manuscript no. 3032 of 1662, upper cover, sunburst with crucifix, H[ISU]S K'[RISTO]S type.

In these bindings there is a consistent pattern of representing Christ on the upper cover and the Virgin on the lower one. A number of variations occur, however, some perhaps to be described as anomalous. In general, the sunburst or the sun with flames is reserved for Christ and the sun with stars for the Virgin. However, flames appear with the Virgin on three examples of 1663 (Venice manuscript no. 2143, fig. 1), 1696 (Matenadaran manuscript no. 577), and 1699 (Matenadaran manuscript no. 2805, fig. 7), and flames are sometimes missing around the



Figure 4: Matenadaran manuscript no. 3032 of 1662, lower cover, starburst with Virgin.

crucifix. Only a single example of starbursts around Christ (Matenadaran manuscript no. 3036 of 1663, fig. 8) has been recorded. Another interesting anomaly reflects a throwback to earlier Armenian binding motifs. The crucifix in New Julfa manuscript no. 1 of 1663 (fig. 9) has been used four times in the corners of the rectangular field with the same Armenian tool already seen in older examples. In the central circle, composed of tongues of fire, instead of Christ there is an elaborate geometric pattern used regularly on earlier bindings from Greater Armenia



Figure 5: Matenadaran manuscript no. 200 of 1658, lower cover, starburst with Virgin, MARIAM type.

in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and above and below the central medallion, Virgin stamps. New Julfa manuscript no. 134, also of 1663, has Christ in the sunburst, but the Virgin on the lower cover is enclosed in a simple double-line circle englobed in an outer circle made of twelve floral stamps (fig. 10). Still another example, New Julfa manuscript no. 375 of 1667, with Christ in a sunburst, shows in place of the Virgin on the lower cover only floral stamps.

In the final flourishing of the sunburst-starburst type in the 1690s, an elongated octagon-shaped cartouche is introduced between the central cir-

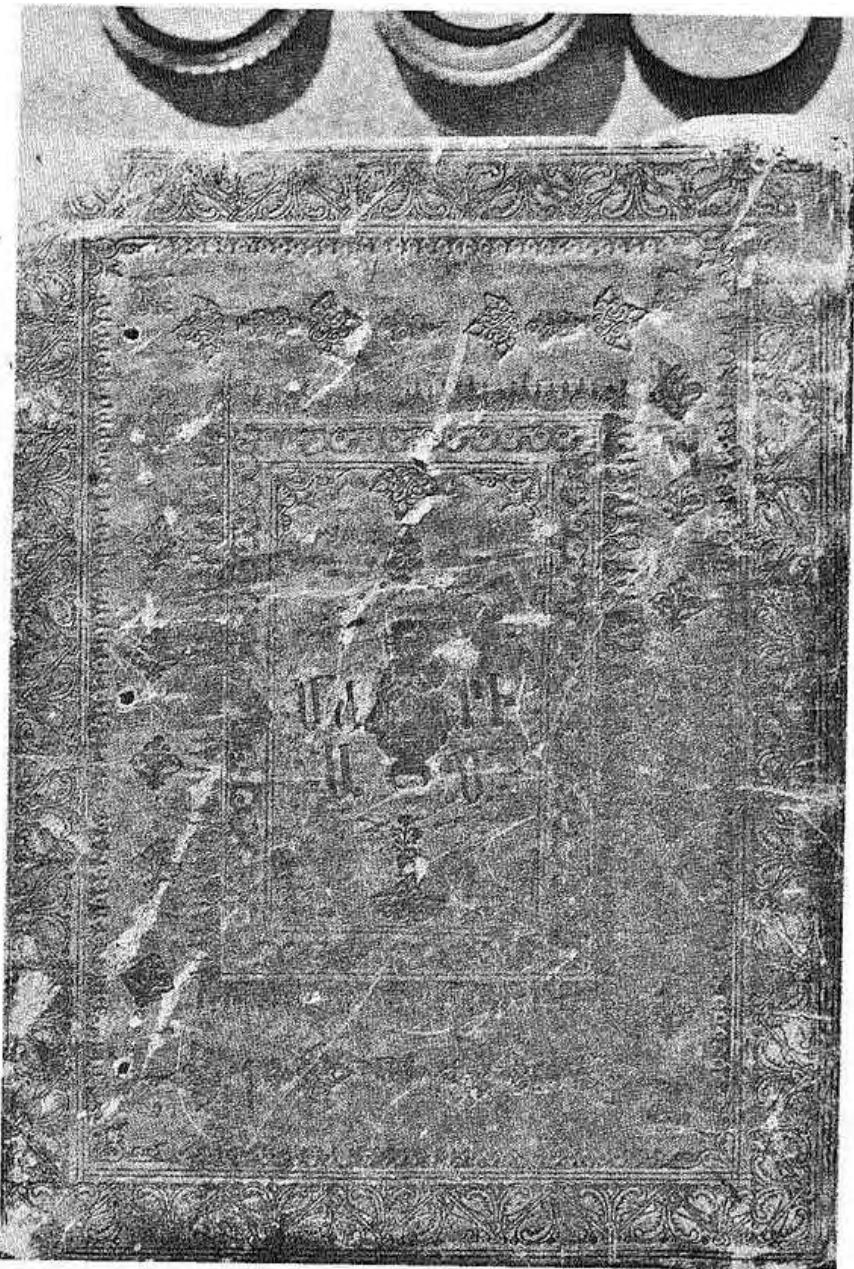


Figure 6: New Julfa manuscript no. 484 of 1663, lower cover, punch dot with Virgin, MARIAM type.

cle and the outer rectangle. Prior to this type, in the 1670s and 1680s, an upper cover variant with a sunburst-Crucifixion was the inspiration for a number of experiments with the decoration of the field. Three bindings have upper covers with Christ in the sunburst circle reinforced with punch dots (New Julfa manuscript no. 222 of 1672; New Julfa manuscript no. 401 of 1686, fig. 11; New Julfa manuscript no. 21 of 1687, fig. 12), but instead of the Virgin, the lower cover shows a field covered with floral stamps divided into diamond sections by intersecting



Figure 7: Matenadaran manuscript no. 2805 of 1669, lower cover, sunburst, with Virgin.

diagonal lines, much like an Armenian binding type from the Crimea which has yet to be studied.²⁰ Of these, New Julfa manuscript no. 401

²⁰ I have observed this “Crimean” type on a number of manuscripts in the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Matenadaran. It is similar to designs found in late Byzantine bindings, for example cover types 4, 5, and 6 in Carlo Federici and Kostantinos Houlis, *Legature Bizantine Vaticane* (Rome: Palombri, 1988), p. 66, fig. 37. For Armenian examples from the BnF, Paris Armenian manuscript no. 61 of 1668, Paris Armenian manuscript no. 257 of 1616, Paris Armenian manuscript no. 255 of 1721.



Figure 8: Matenadaran manuscript no. 3036 of 1663, upper cover, starburst with crucifix.

has the corners of the field stamped with a floral design to form a pseudo-octagon (fig. 11), and New Julfa manuscript no. 21 has a triple rectangular frame anticipating the style of the 1720s (fig. 2) with five enclosed rectangles.

With regard to the octagon type itself, seven specimens dated from 1691 to 1699 have been recorded. The first, Matenadaran manuscript no. 1679 dated 1691 (fig. 13), shows a very elongated cartouche-octagon in the center of which is a crucifix surrounded only by a circle of dots;



Figure 9: New Julfa manuscript no. 1 of 1663, upper cover, sunburst with geometric design, four crucifixes of H[ISU]S K'[RISTO]S type, two Virgin stamps.

the lower cover has a field of floral stamps forming a pseudo-octagon similar to New Julfa manuscript no. 401 of 1686 (fig. 11). The second, Venice manuscript no. 1351 of 1695, has already been published,²¹ showing respectively the sunburst-starburst motifs with two additional

²¹ Kouymjian, "Venice," p. 407, no. 2, fig. 2, upper cover; Kouymjian, "Inscribed Armenian Manuscript Bindings," p. 107, no. 2, fig. 2, upper cover; Kouymjian, "Les reliures des manuscrits arméniens," no. 4.



Figure 10: New Julfa manuscript no. 134 of 1663, lower cover, Virgin with circle of floral stamps.

smaller crucifix stamps under the large cross within a dotted circle on the upper cover. The third, Matenadaran manuscript no. 577 of 1696 (fig. 14), has evolved greatly with an octagon both wider and shorter containing a crucifix surrounded by a double row of punch dots plus a sunburst; the lower cover uses the expected floral stamps but has in the center a Virgin in a double circle, the inner one with dots, all within a sunburst. All three examples dated 1698 have a crucifix in the field of the upper cover: New Julfa manuscript no. 479, with a circle of dots and

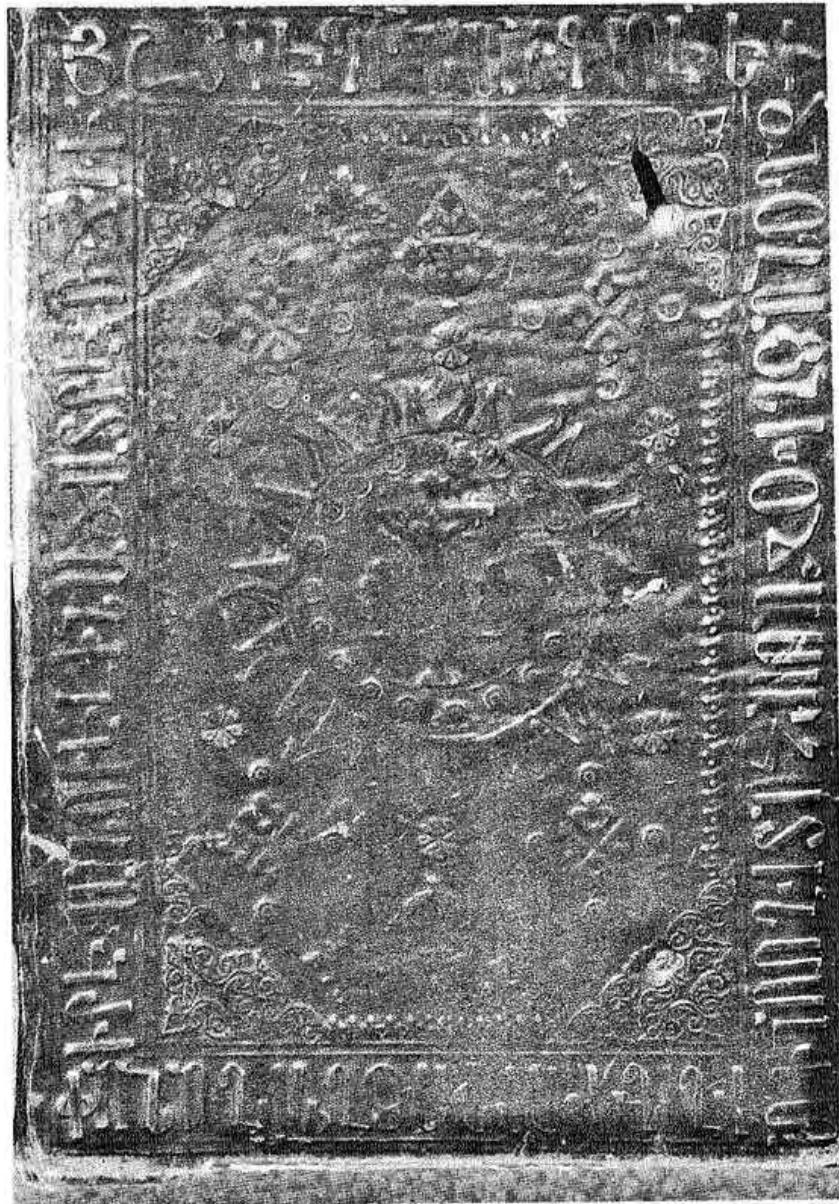


Figure 11: New Julfa manuscript no. 401 of 1686, upper cover, sunburst with crucifix.

a sunburst; Matenadaran manuscript no. 1935 (fig. 15), with a circle of dots and four “flames” each in the corner of the square which inscribes the circle and with the Armenian inscription within the cartouche rather than the outer rectangular frame; and Matenadaran manuscript no. 2625, which appears to have a crucifix under the paper library tag pasted on the upper cover. Two of the latter have floral decorations without the Virgin on the lower cover, New Julfa manuscript no. 479 and Matenadaran manuscript no. 1935, while Matenadaran manuscript no. 2625

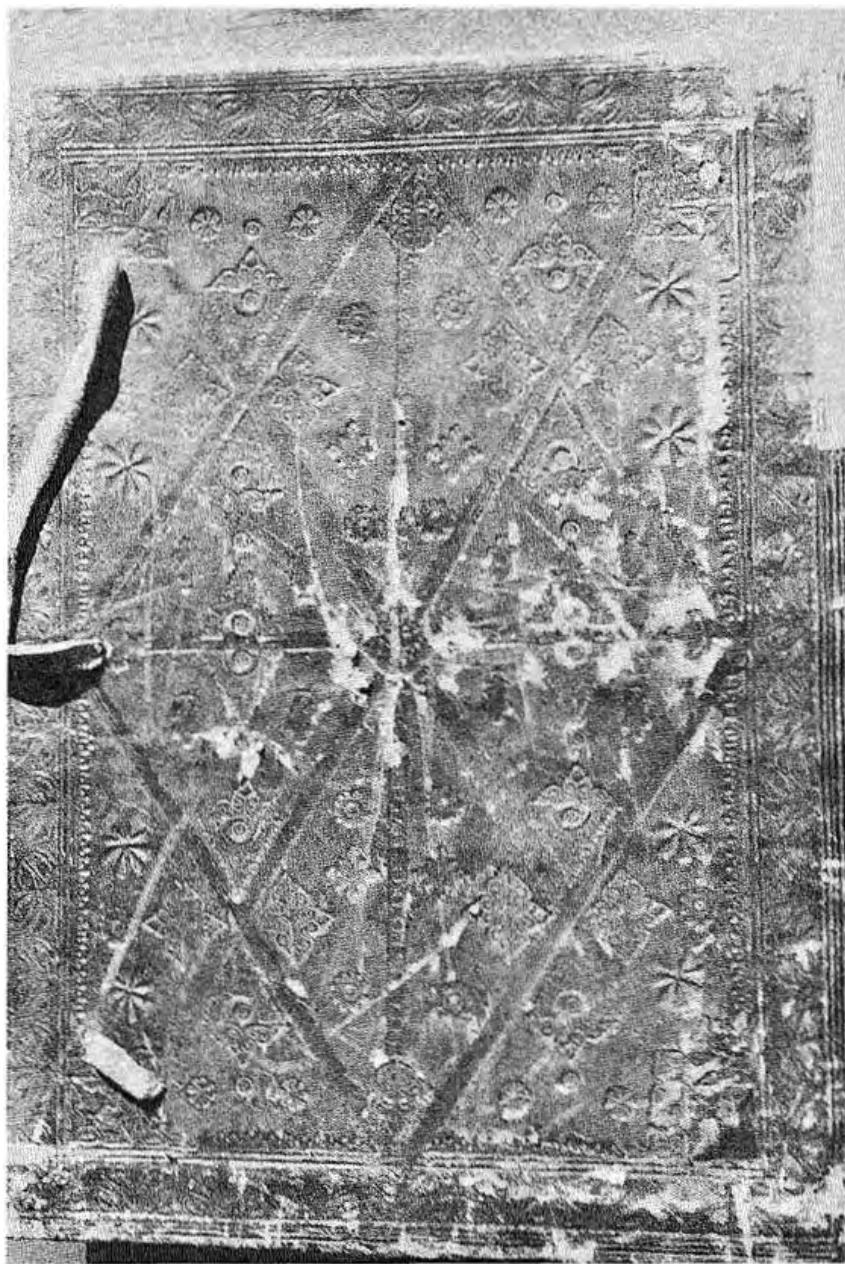


Figure 12: New Julfa manuscript no. 21 of 1687, lower cover, intersecting diamonds.

shows the Virgin in a starburst. The last binding with the octagon motif, Matenadaran manuscript no. 2805 of 1699 (fig. 7), has its dated inscription on the flap rather than the upper cover, which has the crucifix within a dotted circle and sunburst. The Virgin on the lower cover is also within a sunburst and dotted circle. It should be underlined that if the octagon type represents a workshop active in the 1690s, other workshops, or at least other inscribed bindings of the same decade, avoid using the octagon, for instance Matenadaran manuscript no. 2266 of

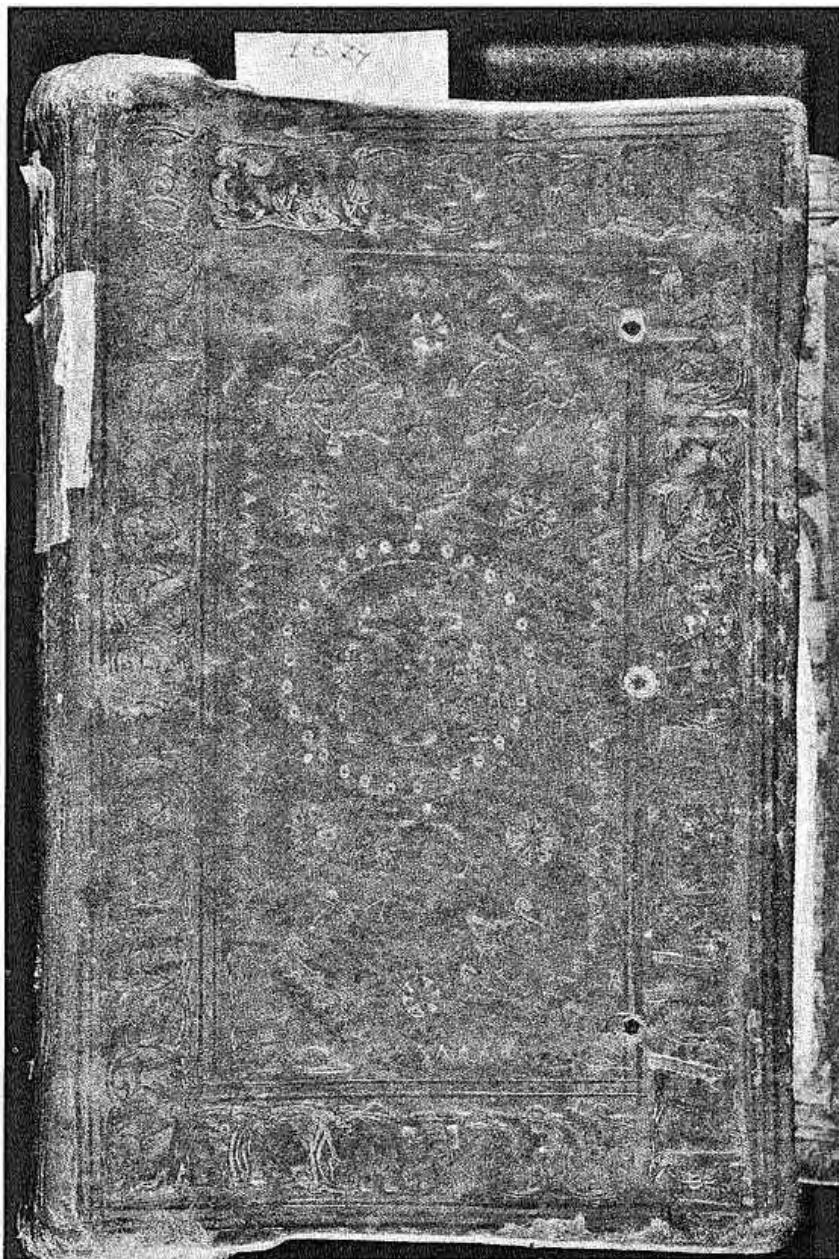


Figure 13: Matenadaran manuscript no. 1679 dated 1691, upper cover, octagonal field with crucifix in dotted circle.

1693 uses neither the octagon field pattern nor the sunburst-starburst combination, though there is a crucifix on the upper cover with punch dots around it.

This way of decorating disappears at the end of the seventeenth century, when the binding craft also deteriorates, as witnessed by less careful workmanship in general and much less rigorous use of stamping tools (Matenadaran manuscript no. 2029 of 1696, fig. 16). There is a momentary revival of finely produced bindings in the 1720s and perhaps



Figure 14: Matenadaran manuscript no. 577 of 1696, upper cover, sunburst within octagonal field with double dotted circles.

into the 1730s using motifs of successive rectangles (Venice manuscript no. 1690 of 1704; Matenadaran manuscript no. 3305 of 1715; New Julfa manuscript no. 452 of 1725, fig. 2; Paris Armenian manuscript no. 25 of 1730²²), after which the New Julfa binderies seem to decline or even

²² Macler, "Note sur quelques manuscrits," pp. 15-16, fig. 1, upper cover; Macler, *Catalogue des manuscrits arméniens et géorgiens*, no. 25, pp. 11-12; Kouymjian, "Les reliures des manuscrits arméniens," no. 10.



Figure 15: Matenadaran manuscript no. 1935 of 1698, upper cover, sunburst within octagon field with inscriptions.

stop, reflecting the hardships inflicted on the Armenians and Iranians after the fall of the Safavid dynasty in 1722.

It has not been my intention to cover thoroughly the variety of decorations which appear on inscribed New Julfa bindings. This can only be done in a larger monograph. Rather it seemed to me that the method employed in ordering the substantial data already amassed would be instructive. A typology of the various stamping tools used in Julfa bindings is essential if different workshops are to be identified. Tracing the use of these stamps in manuscripts is similar to the method of die linkage in

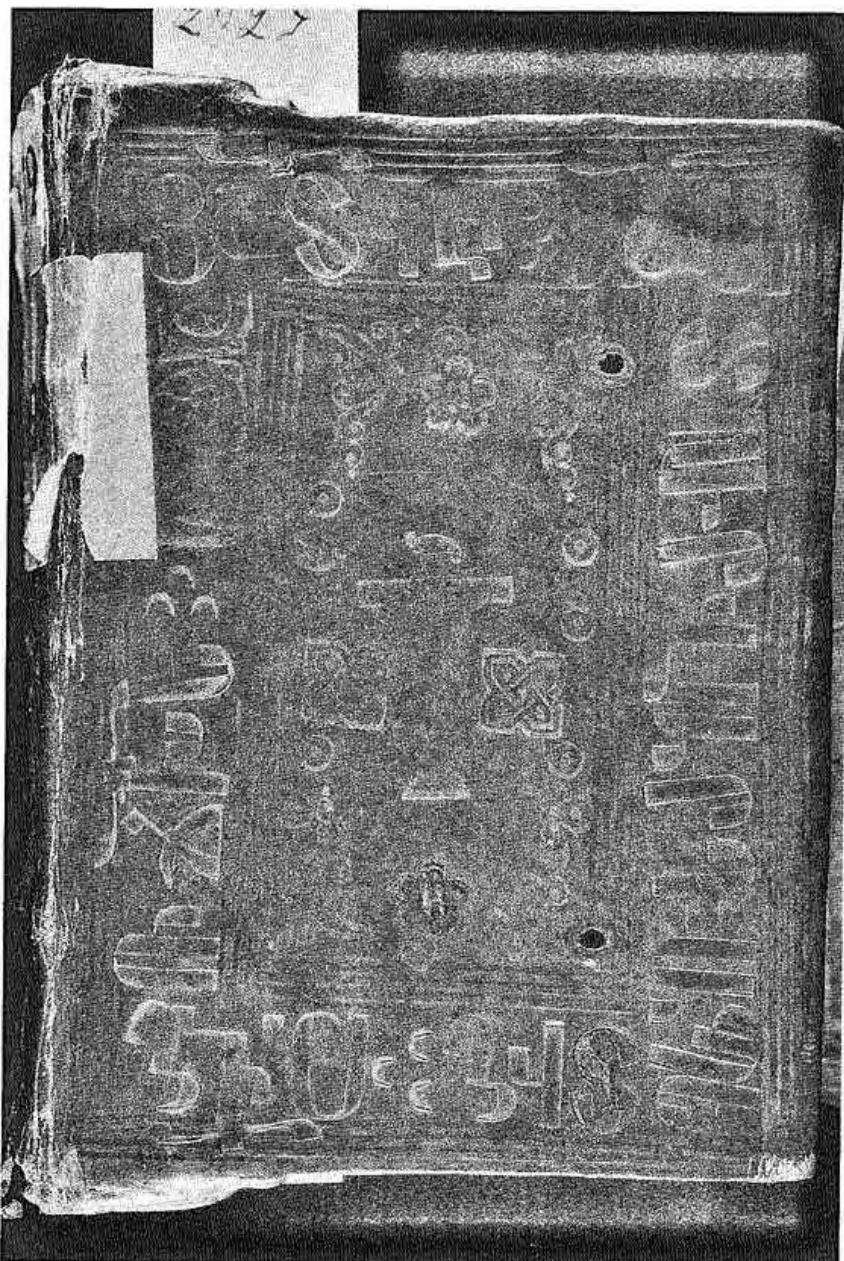


Figure 16: Matenadaran manuscript no. 2029 of 1696, upper cover.

numismatics. To prepare such a catalog of tools, I and a group of computer literate students in the Armenian Studies Program at California State University, Fresno, have used imaging techniques to outline the shape of actual stamps employed on the bindings, rather than making traditional drawings or rubbings of them.²³ This has been done by scan-

²³ Sean Clark, a student in computer design at Fresno State, did the imaging of the bindings and isolated the individual stamps. The work is part of the computerization of the *Index of Armenian Art*, a project funded in part by the Garabedian Foundation and to which Joseph Krajekian, Ali Peyvandi, and Emmanuel Ohannesian have contributed.

ning quality color slides, isolating individual tool stamps through the copy and paste method, and then enhancing the digitized design when necessary with Adobe Photoshop software.

The upper and lower cover of each manuscript was laid out side by side on a single screen accompanied by the repertory of stamps used on the binding, for example Venice manuscript no. 2143 of 1663 (fig. 1). With these data, a catalog of stamping irons was established showing the manuscripts on which each was employed.²⁴ One drawback of this process is the difficulty, in the absence of a scale in each photo, of establishing the true size of these stamps. This can be done, however, through rubbings made of many of the bindings. Whichever way the individual stamp designs are accumulated, manually or by computer, it is evident that a complete corpus can be established. This in turn can be used, as imagined at the beginning of the research, to clearly identify and approximately date bindings without inscriptions from New Julfa.

The publication and analysis of the textile doublures of Armenian manuscripts has not progressed very far.²⁵ Computerization is being used to store and arrange cloth samples from dated bindings.²⁶ These doublures will someday serve as a dated pattern book for Near Eastern, Mediterranean, Indian, and Armenian textiles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The New Julfa material will be published in a later article.

Conclusion

Why did the practice of inscribed leather bindings flourish in New Julfa, and why did it happen in the second half of the seventeenth century? I have hinted elsewhere that the process was linked to the development of printing at the All Savior Monastery of this Armenian suburb of Isfahan.²⁷ The establishment of a printing press was the work of Khach'atur Vardapet Kesarats'i, the Prelate of New Julfa from 1620 to 1646. Much has been written on Khach'atur's pioneering operation begun in 1636, which produced its first title in 1638. Colophons of the seven titles issued in Julfa from 1638 to 1650 underline the amateur

²⁴ This same technique of copy and paste was experimented with in the preparation of the *Album of Armenian Paleography* being prepared by Michael Stone, Henning Lehmann, and myself.

²⁵ Lydia Dournovo, *Armjanskaja naboika* (Moscow: State Publishing House for Plastic Arts, 1953), still remains the major reference.

²⁶ When this paper was presented at the SAS/MESA meeting, slides of four sample doublures were shown: Matenadaran manuscript no. 577 of 1696, Venice manuscript no. 1527 of 1700, Matenadaran manuscript no. 1443 of 1701, and Venice manuscript no. 1690 of 1704.

²⁷ Kouymjian, "Les reliures de manuscrits arméniens."

nature of the undertaking: neither Khach'atur nor any of the other clerics who worked with him had any experience or direct knowledge of printing.²⁸ It was the first press in Iran, and the Armenian books were the first to be printed in that country in any language. Khach'atur and his team manufactured their own low-grade paper, prepared the ink, made or had fashioned the press, and commissioned Armenian metal workers and jewelers to engrave the fonts and the individual letters in a variety of sizes in both *erkat'agir* capitals and *bolorgir* lower case letters. The venture was short-lived, in part because of the death of Khach'atur in 1646. Thirty-seven years later, in 1687-1688, three additional titles were published, after which 175 years were to pass before other Armenian books were printed in New Julfa.

The first binding in the distinctively New Julfa style dates to 1658 (Matenadaran manuscript no. 200, fig. 5). The press was dormant, but the metal type, the Armenian letters, supported by long shafts were available for other purposes. Some binder, no doubt a monk, probably had the idea of using these letters as stamping tools, thereby allowing elegant inscriptions to be pressed out on the leather while at the same time providing a binder's or patron's colophon. Each letter was itself a tool, a decorative stamp. I have not yet definitively compared the *erkat'agir* letters from the printed books with those used for the binding inscriptions. Different sizes and styles were used in both media. That metal stamps were employed for the lettering on the covers is clear by letters which have burned through some of the bindings from the overheating of irons before they were applied to the leather.²⁹ Even if a one-to-one correspondence cannot be established between the letters used for printing and the stamps for binding, Julfa binders could have turned for their tools to the same Armenian engravers used by Khach'atur.

Finally, an interesting inscribed silver binding, dated 1669, on the lower cover of a manuscript now in the Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago (manuscript no. 951, fig. 17) demonstrates the close relationship between the precious metal workers and the binders of New Julfa. The style of binding is very close to that of inscribed leather

²⁸ Khach'atur did send Hovhannēs Jughayets'i to Europe to learn the craft. He printed a book in Livorno in 1646 and returned to New Julfa with a press and fonts, but Khach'atur had died. Details in L. Minasean, *Nor Jughayi tparann u ir tpagrats grk'erē* (The Press at New Julfa and Its Printed Books) (New Julfa: Armenian Prelacy, 1972), p. 38ff.

²⁹ Bibliothèque nationale de France, Armenian manuscript no. 245, see Kouymjian, "Les reliures de manuscrits arméniens," no. 3; for early references to the manuscript: Macler, *Catalogue des manuscrits arméniens et géorgiens*, pp. 11-12, no. 245; Frédéric Macler, *Miniatures arméniennes: Vie du Christ, peintures ornementales* (Paris, P. Geuthner, 1913), p. 42, pl. LXVII, fig. 184.



Figure 17: University of Chicago manuscript no. 951 of 1669, lower cover in silver with Virgin in center of rectangular field.

varieties, with a rectangular band of letters forming the central field where the Virgin is predictably shown on the lower plaque. Even the studs used to fasten the silver plaque to the boards of the binding are identical to the rosettes encountered so often on New Julfa leather bindings. This silver cover provokes the question: which came first, metal plaques in this style imitated by the binders, or leather worked decoration imitated by the jewelers? The answer will have to wait another occasion.